

## The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

### Ohio State Engineer

**Title:** The Engineer's Bookshelf

**Creators:** Dumble, Wilson R.

**Issue Date:** 1941-11

**Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering

**Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 25, no. 1 (November, 1941), 10.

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/35792>

# The Engineer's Bookshelf

"Prof." Wilson R. Dumble, Dept. of English

If you are an upperclassman and if you read this column in the November 1940 issue of *The Engineer*, you may recall that its editor bemoaned the lack of war books that had failed to appear. At that time World War II had been in progress a little more than one year, and nothing worth reading about the war had been published. The Editor referred to Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and to Sir Nevil Henderson's "The Failure of a Mission"; but he dismissed them as unexciting and unimportant literary contributions. May 10, 1940 had come and gone, and still we had nothing worth reading about the European setup.

Today, the literary horizon presents an entirely different picture. During the last eleven months hardly a week has passed when there was not published some sort of a book—fiction, biography, or drama—dealing directly with Germany and the War in all its many facets. Although a few of these publications make good reading, most of them do not. The Editor believes that Valtin's *Out of the Night* cannot be included in the better list. The most readable of all, he feels, is the one reviewed below, Mr. Shirer's *Berlin Diary*.

As was intimated in the column a year ago, the best book about World War II will be written and published by the obscure "little" man some ten, twenty, or even forty years after the present conflict ends. That was the case in the Civil War (Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, 1895), and it was also the case in World War No. I (Ernest Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*, 1928). Let us not get too excited about any of the 1941 publications; time, yet, will tell.

One of the most remarkable books to come out of World War II is William L. Shirer's *Berlin Diary*, published last June. I read it one sultry afternoon in July on the beach of a small lake in southern Michigan near Ann Arbor and was immediately impressed with Mr. Shirer's style and readability. The author, you may remember, had been until last December the Berlin correspondent of the Columbia Broadcasting System, and it is his voice that you heard many mornings and evenings sending sad war news through the ether waves to this country. A diary, generally speaking, is a piece of writing that the author never intends for publication. At least that is my impression. Mr. Shirer's diary, however, is quite to the contrary. He frankly admits that he jotted down his writings with the very idea that some day he would be back in America and would like to tell the people of his country some of the incidents that were deleted by German censors in his broadcasts. He was able to slip his notes by the watchful eye of the Gestapo, after, of course, destroying some of his

material that would be quite incriminating should he be stopped.

What I like about *Berlin Diary* is the very fact that it is profusely punctuated with the author's own observation about places and art and literature, a quality that sends the reader on from page to page so swiftly and so interestedly that the six hundred pages of the book seem too short a space to satisfy. He reads Wells and Shaw and Hemmingway, Ellis and Bearl and Dreiser. He sees bull fights in Spain; he visits the El Grecos in Toledo and the Titians and Botticellis in Italy. He saw Fascist mobs in Paris in 1934 storm the Chamber of Deputies, and he stood in the Place de la Concorde to watch the sullen hordes of Nazi troops march under the Arc de Triomphe. He visited the ruins of the splendid library in Louvain, after he had witnessed the pomp of Nazi meetings in Nuremburg.

Under the date of August 2, 1934, he writes: "Hindenburg died this morning. Who can be president now? What will Hitler do?" On June 14, 1940, he writes: "Poor Paris! I weep for her. For so many years it was my home—and I loved it as you love a woman . . . Tomorrow, probably, I shall leave for Paris. I do not want to go. I do not want to see the heavy-heeled German boots tramping down the streets I love."

In one entry Mr. Shirer catches in a few words the magic that is Switzerland's. I like the following passage under the headline of Lausanne, June, 1938: "We came up the lake on a paddle steamer, Tess and Ed Murrow and I, on this glorious June afternoon, the water blue like the Mediterranean, the shores splashing green, the Jura Mountains to the left, a deep smoky blue, the Alps to the right, pink and white under the sun and snow. It was almost overwhelming."

Under a date line in Berlin on August 24, 1939, I find this entry: "With Russia in his bag Hitler is not compromising, apparently. Russia in his bag! What a turn events have taken in the last forty-eight hours. Russia and Germany, the arch-enemies of this earth, suddenly turning the other cheek and becoming friends and concluding what, to one's consternation, looks like an alliance." That entry, I believe, in view of what has happened during the past summer is very interesting.

Mr. Shirer's intimate account of Germany makes his *Berlin Diary* amazingly good reading, either on the sandy shores of a cool Michigan lake or in the confines of one's room when the midnight wind is howling through the trees. Extremely revealing, it moves with great rapidity.